

IDAHO STATESMAN

Ranch kids embrace hands-on learning; Hubble donation will help Christian Children's Ranch expand auto shop

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The Idaho Statesman

Student residents at the Christian Children's Ranch in Eagle will soon get to immerse themselves in all kinds of greasy engine parts, motor oil, carburetors — not to mention marketable skills.

A \$25,000 donation from Hubble Homes is helping the ranch expand its auto body shop on its compound on West Duck Alley Road.

Phil Abbott, Children's Ranch administrator, said the ranch already has plans drawn for the new structure and is surveying land to get its building permit. He anticipates the new auto center will open in the new year.

The ranch, which cares for children in need who live and attend school on-site, relies on donations from citizens and from organizations such as Idaho Foodbank and local churches. Most residents, Abbott said, have discipline problems at their homes or parents who are struggling financially, in prison, or are otherwise unable to care for their children.

The average stay for children at the ranch is about a year and a half, Abbott said, but kids have stayed as long as eight years. Right now, he added, 36 kids in grades 1 through 12 call the ranch home.

As part of their education at the school, kids can focus on different vocational skills. Auto body has always been popular, Abbott said. The new facility will be able to accommodate more than one car at a time for students to work on, he said. The program also will benefit from the presence of teacher Bruce Wallace, who has 25 years of experience in the field.

Danny, a junior, is one of the program's best auto shop students. Danny said the expanded shop will not only add space, but will bring a "better understanding" to the trade, with more tools and more opportunities to build things — like go carts. Danny wants to have his own auto shop in the future and admitted to being one of those kids who always liked to take things apart. When he was little, he took his dad's ratchet wrench and disassembled the engine in the family tractor.

"My dad wasn't too happy about it," Danny said.

Danny and the four or five other students who are interested in auto body have been working on restoring a Model T, circa 1929, under Mr. Wallace's watch. Wallace and his students claim the car will be drivable in the near future. The new shop will surely help.

Abbott said Hubble Homes has a long history of generosity toward the Children's Ranch. For example, Hubble has built some of the ranch's structures free of charge. Don Hubble, president of the company "has done a lot for us," said Abbott, "and as you look around, he's done a lot for the community, for example building skate parks for kids. He must really have a spot in his heart for youth."

"Supporting the Christian Children's Ranch in Eagle is an ideal way for us to help the community and offer young people a place to live, learn and grow," Hubble said.

The Christian Children's Ranch has been part of the community since 1946, when the Kernen family created a shelter in Boise's North End for homeless children. In 1976, the organization

bought 80 acres near Eagle, the ranch's current home. In 1993, the ranch gained an addition of more than 300 acres north of Fairfield.

No children live on that site now, but Abbott said it will open to residents next year.